

Paradise found



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY MILTON & DISTRICT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

For homeowners in new subdivisions, it may be difficult to imagine an empty, backyard space being transformed into a private, backyard paradise. On July 13, the Milton Horticultural Society held its annual Garden Tour with six private gardens open to the public - gardens that at one time also started out as empty spaces. Pictured above is a glimpse into the yard of Pat and Ida Levac of Roseheath Drive, Milton. The lobster trap, pulled from the ocean by the Levacs and now affixed to the fence above the statue, is a souvenir from Mrs. Levac's birthplace, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia.

Givin' you the dirt: This column is for the birds

By SEAN JAMES N.P.D. PRESIDENT OF FERN RIDGE LANDSCAPING



There are so many beautiful creatures and plants on this planet. On a regular basis we hear how some species is being pushed out because of man's development.

I look at the building going on and all the farm and meadow being 'dozed. I know I can't stop that or, if I could, I don't know if I should. I do know that something should be done to help mitigate the damage.

Recently I consulted for a couple having problems with neighbours. The issue was the couple's preference for a low maintenance, wildlife-friendly property in a very wild style. The solution was to manicure and mow some areas that the neighbours could see, yet leave others wild. We made a list of wild plants that had a high aesthetic appeal so that even the wild areas were attractive. Finally screens of evergreens were to be planted to limit the view.

A bit of our solution could be applied to every property. It seems to me that perhaps we could all put up with a very small wild area out of the main field of view. I'm not asking much.

Really. Just a few feet.

Think of planting some shrubs like the Butterfly Bush and perennials like coneflower and butterfly milkweed. Plant a climbing Dropmore Scarlet Honeysuckle that is beautiful all season with its red flowers and attracts hummingbirds. Goldenrod is coming into style finally since folks are realizing that the pollen is not a cause of allergies. The bright flowers are welcome in late summer, and it makes a great show with fall asters. Just because something grows on the side of the road doesn't make it a weed. The red berries on a Highbush Cranberry make great food for the birds late in the winter, and the spring flowers are lovely. The Washington Hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopynum*) also makes a great bird shelter and food source. It has spring flowers, summer berries, fall colour and great winter form. It's a fine addition to any landscape.

Incidentally, a small wild patch would help out the rest of the yard by providing a place for beneficial insects and animals to live. These would then migrate out into the yard and help keep pests in check throughout the garden.

Besides being graceful and interesting in winter, native grasses such as Switch Grass offer shelter for preying mantids and other beneficial insects.

If you can spare the space in a back corner plant a cultivar (ornamental selection) of the native juniper, *Juniperus virginiana*. Let it get big and shaggy, and it will provide nesting sites, hiding spots and a great food source for so many different species of birds including the Cedar Waxwing. While I usually don't recommend this plant, in a back corner it can be lovely in the winter. Dotting a couple of nesting boxes around the property would offer even more habitat for birds. It's easy as pie. Birds eat bugs. Enough said.

This style of gardening may not be to everybody's taste, but it will help our displaced little neighbours, especially if everyone does a bit. It will also reduce the need for chemicals since you are encouraging wild friends which eat the pests. Given half a chance, Mother Nature keeps most things in balance. It can be beautiful, and it's in our own best interest to help nature.





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Dr. Bug's Bugbytes

by ROBERT CAMERON



Rats, rats big as alley cats...Well, not quite. Rat stories are like fish stories, they get bigger with the passing of time. In fact, a large rat can weigh about 500 grams (1 pound) and be 45 centimetres (17 inches) long from its nose to the tip of its tail.

The common rat in Ontario is the Norway rat, which is also called the brown, wharf or sewer rat. It does not come from Norway but originated in Asia. Rats were spread throughout the world on early sailing ships. These are the largest and most common of the commensal rodents found in North America.

Norway rats are usually brown with lighter coloured undersides but can vary through all shades from white to black. They are heavy bodied with blunt muzzles, and small eyes and ears. These rats prefer to live in burrows in the ground but can also be found living in attics or walls. Houses with dirt basements or crawl spaces provide an ideal site. Norway rats have poor eyesight but well-developed senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch.

They are not able to throw up which is one reason why they are wary of new or different foods. They are good at climbing, jumping and swimming. Females average seven to eight young in each litter with three to six litters a year. Their life span in the wild is six to 12 months.

Rats are more common than most people realize. They not only are found in agricultural, industrial and food-processing operations, but they frequently show up at garbage bins, compost piles, and bird feeders in and around houses. I was once called to a home where we estimated a population of over 300 rats living in the backyard and feeding from the bird feeders. They would come right up and feed out of your hand. The homeowners had had them for years but claimed they didn't know what they were. One estimate is that there are about three billion rats in the world today. Signs of rats include gnaw marks, droppings, tracks, rub or grease marks, burrows and runways. Rats are nocturnal

and very cautious, and will shy away from new objects or changes in their environment.

Adult rats are much larger than mice and have blunt rather than pointed noses. Their tails are shorter compared to their body size than those of mice. Young rats can be distinguished from mice by their larger heads and smaller ears. Rat droppings are thicker and rounded at both ends whereas mouse droppings tend to be thin and pointed at each end.

Controlling rats starts with improving sanitation, eliminating harbourage sites and rat proofing. Rats will readily gnaw through wood and plastic, and have been known to gnaw through lead pipes and uncured cement. Trapping works, but rats can become trap-shy and will then avoid traps. Rodenticides are effective against rats, but great care must be taken as dogs will readily eat the baits.

As a last resort, if all else has failed, Pied Pipers are said to be effective, but make sure that you pay them.

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